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STATINTL

The Wise Words Of Sen. Fulbright

By Marquis Childs

As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. J. William Fulbright of Arkansas has assumed a role of the first importance in shaping American foreign policy. It is as a critic, detached but also thoroughly informed, that Fulbright is performing a service the significance of which is just beginning to be evident.

In the context of an entirely different set of circumstances what Fulbright is undertaking has some resemblance to the great service of the late Sen. Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan. At the end of World War II Vandenberg renounced his former isolationism and successfully brought the Republican party, and with it a large and stubborn segment of opinion, around to the need for America to play an active and constructive role in world leadership. He was one of the chief instruments in the success of the Marshall Plan which saved Western Europe from communism.

With, as he believes, American commitments today extended far beyond any practical limits Fulbright is arguing the need to scale down these commitments to reasonable proportions. What he is saying both in public and in private is that these commitments are in many instances self-defeating. Because they are impossible of fulfillment over the long pull they are contributing to a growing mood of frustration in the country, and that frustration threatens to lead either to war or to a new form of the isolationism which Vandenberg believed was ended.

THE memorandum dated March 29 on Cuba, which Senator Fulbright sent to President Kennedy two weeks before the tragic Cuban fiasco was launched, is a model of reasoned statesmanship. It was a clear and unmistakable warning that any invasion attempt, whether failure or success, would shatter the treaty system on which the relationships of the hemisphere are based and thereby have disastrous political and economic consequences. Success of an invasion attempt, with the need for the United States to sustain over a long period a military dictatorship in Cuba, might be worse than failure, the memorandum pointed out.

In a Senate speech last week Fulbright related many of America's problems in distant parts of the earth to his approach to policy-making. He said:

"It may be that the time has come to reappraise some of our basic assumptions. Throughout much of this century many Americans assumed—wrongly—that the transgressions and affronts to world order committed by aggressive forces were none of our business. With the collapse of that assumption, a good many of us have swung in the other direction and to the opposite conclusion that we can—and should—impose our design for living upon the uncertain but aspirant societies of the world. This assumption is also illogical. However admirable our design may be, it cannot be imposed."

This is what Fulbright is saying in a challenging and forthright fashion as government witnesses present the case for foreign aid in closed committee sessions. Is this essential to the nation's security? Does it contribute to that security, or is it a delusion bound to end in bitterness and perhaps disaster?

THERE are things that can be done with military force in being, Fulbright is saying. But it is important to understand the limits of that force. Where force cannot impose the American design or even compel any meaningful allegiance to a military alliance it is wiser to accept the neutral solution. He would apply this concept to much of Southeast Asia.

The other day Fulbright sent a memorandum to the President on Berlin. He will not discuss its contents, since he believes the situation is so delicate and the President's decision so difficult.

But it could be an important factor in whatever decision is taken. On one side is the Acheson plan providing for the call-up of not less than two National Guard divisions to be sent to Europe to buttress American forces in Germany as part of a "mobilization" to impress Moscow with America's determination to stand firm. On the other side are some in the executive branch convinced the United States must come up with constructive alternative plans for Berlin protecting the status of the city while possibly opening the way to negotiation.

Fulbright's friends sometimes urge him to take his case more dramatically and dynamically to the Senate floor. But that is not his style. He is trying through quiet persuasion, the voice of reason, to help bring about one of those profound changes such as in the time of Vandenberg are necessary to adjust the nation's power to the nation's capacity.